



biowatch
SOUTH AFRICA

25
YEARS OF ACTION

biodiversity | food sovereignty | agroecology | social justice | www.biowatch.org.za

JANUARY 2025

BULLETIN

Agroecology in South Africa gains momentum

Agroecology is gaining momentum in South Africa! In November, a group of long-time champions of agroecology in South Africa met in Cape Town to reflect on and plan collaborative initiatives, including a project held by Biowatch to strengthen climate resilience by scaling up agroecology. The group of 12 NGOs and farmer networks, which have formed the “*Agroecology Action Collective*”, will collaborate around three workstreams: advocating for agroecology in national policy processes; building our networks and mapping agroecology nodes and hubs; and supporting farmer enterprises to provide agroecological inputs and training. These important processes will build in participatory action research to integrate and share the learnings processes locally and internationally.



Representatives from some of the 12 NGOs and farmer networks that have formed the “Agroecology Action Collective”.



The KZN Agroecology Network and other farmers from around the country gathered at the 2024 Biowatch Agroecology Farmer Fair to celebrate and strategise their farmer advocacy plans into 2025 (see page 3).

This work also links in with developing a civil society vision for a “*Just Transition of our food system*” and co-ordinating farmers, fishers, labour, NGOs and academics to advocate for this in current policy processes. These processes include revising the National Food and Nutrition Security Plan, a national food system transformation process, and the agriculture sector’s Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Plan (CCAMP).

On the ground, agroecology is spreading. The mycelium of agroecological producers in KwaZulu-Natal spreads with every Biowatch Agroecology Qalisa training and farmer exchange, locally and in the region.

Friends, colleagues, partners and farmers – past and present – joined in the festivities at our 25-year anniversary celebration held in Durban.



See page 3

The 2024 Biowatch Agroecology Farmer Fair included a farmer seed and produce exhibit and exchange, and discussions on markets and movement building.



See page 3

Four outspoken agroecology advocates, representing Biowatch supported farmers in KwaZulu-Natal, attended SKI’s 10-year celebrations in Zimbabwe.



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FROM THE DIRECTOR

Best wishes for 2025 and all that a new year can bring. 2025 also concludes celebrations marking Biowatch's 25 years of action and advocacy for biodiversity, food sovereignty, agroecology and social justice! In July last year we had our formal anniversary celebration (see adjacent pics) – a wonderful event with friends, colleagues, partners and farmers. It also marked the stepping down of long-time Board chairperson David Fig, who was thanked for his consistent, astute and wise leadership and for holding this position since the founding of Biowatch. David Ntseng was warmly welcomed as the new chairperson of the Board. See www.biowatch.org.za/governance/ for more details on our wonderful Biowatch Board of Trustees.

Excellent news is that in January South Africa joined the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture and has become the 154th Contracting Party to the International Treaty. Importantly, Ambassador Nosipho Nausca-Jean Jezile, South African Permanent Representative to the FAO and Chair of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) had this to say: *“South Africa recognises the pivotal role of plant genetic resources in ensuring food security and adapting to the challenges of climate change. By acceding to the International Treaty, we are reaffirming our commitment to conserving our unique biodiversity and collaborating with the global community to achieve sustainable and resilient food systems. This step aligns with our national priorities ... and reinforces our role as a key player in advancing agricultural sustainability.”*

Other positive news shared in this newsletter is the spreading of agroecology and the 10-year anniversary celebration of SKI, which Biowatch was project holder of for many years. Positive news is much needed in a context of global extreme climate events, geopolitical uncertainty, war, and the flaunting of human rights, including locally with the horrific outcomes at the Stilfontein mine in South Africa's North West province.

Rose Williams

Biowatch Durban office:

222 Evans Road, Glenwood, Durban 4001
Telephone: 031 206 2954
E-mail: info@biowatch.org.za
Web: www.biowatch.org.za
www.facebook.com/biowatchsa

Biowatch Mtubatuba office:

Aloe Business Centre, Aloe Ave, Mtubatuba 3935
Telephone: 035 550 3148
E-mail: samu@biowatch.org.za

Biowatch 25th celebration

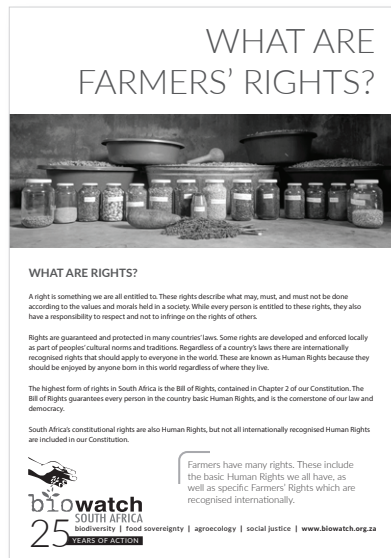


Friends, colleagues, partners and farmers – past and present – joined in the festivities at our 25-year anniversary celebration held in Durban in July. We reflect on Biowatch's 25 years of action and advocacy in the July 2024 issue of the Biowatch Bulletin: www.biowatch.org.za/download/biowatch-bulletin-july-2024/

New publication

What are Farmers' Rights?

This 8-page Biowatch Info Sheet explores Farmers' Rights: what they are; why they are important; and the history of Farmers' Rights. We also investigate and discuss two of the most important legal instruments for Farmers' Rights: the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture; and the Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP). *Biowatch Info Sheet: What are Farmers' Rights?* is available on our website at www.biowatch.org.za/download/what-are-farmers-rights/





The 2024 Biowatch Agroecology Farmer Fair took place in Botha's Hill, Durban, in August. The joyful celebration of seed and Farmers' Rights was attended by Biowatch-supported farmers from northern KwaZulu-Natal, members of the KZN Agroecology Platform, and Seed and Knowledge Initiative (SKI) South African partners.



The four-day event included a vibrant farmer seed and produce exhibit and exchange, discussions exploring agroecology markets and marketing, and a sharing of experiences in movement building – culminating in a shared commitment to build and strengthen an agroecology farmer movement in KZN.



Biowatch South Africa Public Seminar

WEDNESDAY
14 AUGUST 2024

Markets, politics and agroecology



Sipiwe Sithole
African Marmalade



Russel Hlongwane
and Tammy Langtry



Mvuselelo Ngcoya
Bonakude Farm

Did you miss our public seminar?

Recordings are available on our website at

www.biowatch.org.za/public-seminar-markets-politics-and-agroecology/

Sipiwe Sithole (African Marmalade) took a holistic look at the politics of food from seed to plate in South Africa, exploring a restorative journey.

In a performance lecture titled "Icala Lemthombo – The Case of Sorghum", **Russel Hlongwane and Tammy Langtry** presented evidence against the Durban Corporation in the case of stolen umqombothi through the Native Beer Act of 1908.

Mvuselelo Ngcoya (Bonakude Farm) unpacked the strategies employed by the Bonakude network of farmers in Phatheni, Richmond, to deepen local markets.

In October, 27 graduates from AE Qalisa – Biowatch's very popular "introduction to agroecology" trainings held in 2023 and 2024 – were selected to attend AE Qhubeka. This is a 2nd-level agroecology course, structured to build on and deepen participants' understanding and implementation of agroecology practices. The curriculum also includes a focus on soil health, food security and nutrition, and Farmers' Rights. Email samu@biowatch.org.za for more information.

SKI celebrates a decade of strengthening and advocating farmer-led seed systems and agroecology

More than 100 staff and farmers from 13 regional partners in the Seed and Knowledge Initiative (SKI) gathered in September in Harare, Zimbabwe, to celebrate a decade of strengthening and advocating farmer-led seed systems and agroecology. The five-day gathering included a series of inspiring interlinked events.

A grounding opening ceremony began the sharing and reflection on topics including Farmers' Rights, the impacts of climate change, advocacy for agroecology policy, movement building and the inclusion of indigenous knowledge and rituals. A public 10-year celebration event also launched the Zimbabwe Agroecology Knowledge Network and a collective statement asserting Farmers' Rights. At the event, Biowatch-supported farmer Ndoza Fadane represented farmers' voices in a panel discussion. An insightful field trip to Fambidzinai, which has been

a formative learning centre for many in the SKI family, punctuated the deliberations. SKI participants could also attend two parallel Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa (AFSA) events: the 5th Biennial Food Systems Conference; and the African Agroecological Entrepreneurship Conference.

The week concluded at the renowned Harare Good Seed and Food Festival – an awe-inspiring display and exchange of diverse seeds, agroecological produce, innovative equipment, indigenous food cooking demonstrations, music and dance. As Biowatch-supported farmer Nonhlanhla Mkhize remarked: *"Participants departed with new insights, seeds, and connections"*.

See our Facebook page www.facebook.com/biowatchsa for snippets from these events.



Biowatch-supported farmers attending the SKI event and representing farmers' voices from KwaZulu-Natal, were Sipho Zungu, Ndoza Fadane, Nonhlanhla Mkhize, and MJ Mkhwanazi, pictured above with Biowatch's Advocacy and Research Co-ordinator, Vanessa Black.

Biowatch in Rome

Biowatch participation in the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism (CSIPM) to the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) culminated at the annual CSIPM Forum and the 52nd CFS plenary in Rome in October. Priorities included ensuring that the CFS workstream on Collaborative Governance for Co-ordinated Policy Responses is effective in tackling diplomatically-difficult topics around the crises and structural issues increasing hunger globally. A special CFS plenary event marking the 20th anniversary of the Right to Food Guidelines also focused attention on the extreme violation of these rights. The unjust use of food and water as weapons of war, such as in Gaza, threaded through many debates and side events.

South African Chair of the CFS, Ambassador Nausca-Jean Jezile, skillfully built consensus to complete the agenda on time, including adopting Policy Recommendations on Reducing Inequalities. This negotiation was especially difficult with some states contesting the agreed HLPE frame of intersectionality; policy agreements on gender; and refuting the binding nature of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Despite this, the CSIPM acknowledged the policy as a useful starting point, which at least acknowledges concentrations of power in our food system and includes explicit support for the social and solidarity economy. African CSIPM participants presented a statement on key African issues to Africa Group Ambassadors from Burundi, Congo, Egypt, Niger, Nigeria and Morocco.

WHAT'S COMING UP?

- Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism (CSIPM) Forum and the 53rd Committee on World Food Security (CFS) plenary: 18-24 October, Rome
- 2025 UN Climate Change Conference (UNFCCC COP 30): 10-21 November, Brazil
- 2025 G20 Social Summit and Leaders' Summit: November, Johannesburg

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